

High Bickington Parish Council
Clerk: Alan Matthewman
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Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting
Wednesday 10th September 2025 at 7.30 pm in
The Community Centre, High Bickington, First Floor Meeting Room
Members of the public were encouraged to attend.

Members Present: Cllrs. C Kendall (in the chair), F Spencer, M. Parker, J Clarke, D Huntall

- 1: Welcome from the Chair.** Cllr. Kendall reported that he had received formal notification from Cllr Copp that he had decided that pressure of other activities meant that he was no longer able to continue as a councillor. Cllr Spencer also communicated his decision to step down at the end of the meeting. Cllr. Kendall thanked Cllr. Spencer for his long years of service which had been much appreciated by all who had served alongside him. The clerk was instructed to inform the returning officer at Torridge of the vacancies.
- 2: Apologies for absence** – to receive and accept any apologies for absence. Mike Naden, Grant Sheldon, Councillor Cheryl Cottle-Hunkin (Devon CC), Councillor Rosemary Lock (Torridge DC).
- 3: Declarations of Interest** – All councillors to submit revised declarations of interest valid May 2025. Non tabled
- 4: The Chair will, with the consent of members, suspend standing orders to enable presentations by non-council members and members of the public.**
 - a) **Presentation by Cheryl Cottle-Hunkin (Devon CC):** Not present but detailed report at Appendix A:
 - b) **Presentation by Councillor Thomas Elliott (Torridge DC):** Report at Appendix B
 - c) **Receive report from the Speedwatch Group:** No input at the meeting although councillors were aware that the group had raised sufficient funds to acquire the new/replacement speed camera.
 - d) **Public Participation:**

Each member of the public is permitted to raise one item on which they may speak for a maximum of 3 minutes unless the Chair rules otherwise. Items raised in this section are not required to receive a response at this point in the agenda but may be raised in council when the appropriate agenda item is called.

The council received a brief update from K Underwood on progress in forming the Community Resilience Group. In the matter of co-ordinators and volunteers which was going well. He had had discussions regarding the use of the community centre as a co-ordination and warm space in the event of these being needed. He had also spoken to National Grid regarding possible supplies of a generator in the event of a prolonged power outage without much success. National Grid were being helpful, but Generally, contact with other utilities were proving generally very difficult. They were looking at the possibility of acquiring two-way radio equipment and the cost of installing generator connection system at the Community Centre. More help was needed and anyone wishing to get involved can make contact through the council website.

D. Halpin confirmed the Centre were looking at the cost implications of changing the electricity supply set-up to enable generator connectivity. On other matters, the gas heating system was due to be activated on the 14th September, the biomass subsidy having been withdrawn. Costs had been reduced although the standing charge had been increased substantially so the high users will benefit whilst casual users may would see their prices rise significantly. He needed to get contact with the County and District Councillors whose support was key to ongoing success. The AGM will be held at the end of the month, and they were hoping for an influx of new directors.

Chair shall move the restoration of standing orders so that the council can resume the full meeting

- 5:** To consider the impact of the move to a unitary authority on the electors of High Bickington and to make such recommendations as may be deemed applicable to Devon County Council and Torridge District Council. People need encouragement to take part in the surveys being run by DCC and TDC.

- 6: **Urgent Matters at the discretion of the Chair:** To consider any urgent matters raised by the chair or by councillors which may need urgent discussion or be required to be put on the agenda at the next meeting for decision. Further discussion and decision on remediation work on and near Mill Lane copse. Highways had indicated that their expert had inspected them and concluded that no actions were required at this time. As regards the oak tree in Barton Meadow some councillors had visited the site and there were different views regarding the degree of risk involved.
Proposed by Cllr. Kendall, seconded by Cllr. Parker that council should obtain 3 quotations for a survey on trees on parish council land and recommendations for action. Councillors asked for any recommendations tree surgeons. Approved unanimously.

Village Car Park – There were still long-term car parking issues. Proposed that a Parking Sign be made available stating Village Car Park – No Overnight Parking. Agreed that local sign maker be used if possible.

- 7: To note the possible sale or closure of one or both public houses in the village and consider what options may be available to the community. Note on progress of survey. Cllr Clarke reported that 195 responses had been received which was regarded as very positive. Two had expressed an interest in the consortium.

- 8: **Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on Wednesday 9th July 2025. Proposed by Cllr Kendall, seconded by Cllr Huntall as a true record of the meeting. Approved unanimously.**

- 9: **Matters arising from the Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on 9th July 2025** None raised.

- 10: **Changes to AGAR requirements 2026 regarding e-mail addresses and security of data. Clerk to report.** The Clerk reported that a new requirement on data protection would be introduced to the AGAR programme (Assertion 10) which set out:

1: Requirements on the format and accessibility of the council website

2: The record keeping on the website should meet national standards, and

3; That the (main) e-mail address, namely that of the clerk, should be a .gov.uk address for GDPR and security reasons. There was an attitude by NALC that all councillors should have .gov.uk addresses, but at a cost of £70 per councillor per annum this was regarded as OTT by most observers. What was clear was that the current HBPC procedure of using personal emails was not compliant and would lead to a failure of AGAR next year if not corrected. The clerk had booked onto an online course on the 23rd September by Parish Online on the subject and would bring a proposal to the next meeting.

- 11: **Police Matters –**

- a) Update on any local police and/or Neighbourhood Watch matters. No contact active as yet.
- b) receive report on police activity since last meeting.

- 12: **Maintenance**

- (a) Highways – To receive a report from Councillor Parker.
- (b) Footpaths and Byways – to consider appointment of new footpath warden following the resignation of Councillor Keen. Clerk to supply information of how the P3 Programme works. The clerk explained that grant funding was available from DCC for maintenance of footpaths proportional to the mileage of said paths within the parish so long as annual reports were supplied on the status of such paths. As a separate issue the clerk reported on a conversation he had had with Roger Keen regarding the damaged tree which had been discussed early in the year. He had said that the landowner had suggested that the tree be relocated to a position near to the stile leading into the woodland area adjacent to the field. It was not clear from the conversation whether this was an alternative to what council believed to be the requirement to replace the damaged tree, or moving the existing tree to make room for the replacement. There was also some doubt that the damaged tree would grow in the suggested location because of the dense canopy. The clerk would get back to Mr Keen to discuss the full suggestion with him and report back by e-mail.

© Defibrillator update – Status on installation of solar powered housing.

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13: Finance:

To consider Accounts for current year to date: Deferred until October meeting

To approve new payments to be made

Zurich Insurance - £850.77

Clerk Salary – 2 months £832

SLCC Meeting cost £11.60

12: Planning

Response from Elgin Energy regarding Deptford Farm Solar Farm – Clerk confirmed that he had finally found the response after Councillor Elliott had contacted Elgin. Their response was very positive saying that they would be delighted to meet to discuss the Community benefit proposals in the near future. This therefore required that council meet with interested parties to draw up a short-list of possibilities to be considered.

13. Correspondence:

To consider any urgent correspondence received by the Clerk or Councillors since last meeting

Correspondence with Devon CC School Transport regarding provision of additional bus stop and uniform issues. Correspondence begun and awaiting progress. Awaiting a response.

Date of next meeting, Wednesday 8th October at 7.30 pm

Alan Matthewman

Clerk to the Parish Council

Appendix A: Councillor Cheryl Cottle-Hunkin Report (Devon CC Ward Member)

Great news to report on The Globe in Great Torrington, they reached their £230,000 goal with just a few days to go! They even raised an additional £10k and these funds will go further towards the restoration. The goal being reached means it is now owned by the community, unlocking more than half a million pounds from central government as part of the previous government's "levelling up" funding. Brilliant news for Great Torrington and the surrounding area!

I had a large number of people contact me, including the headteacher of Great Torrington School, in relation to Stagecoach's price hike which took effect 20th July. There was no warning and a lack of communication that this was happening, meaning that many children didn't even have enough money to get home from school (those who travel out of catchment ie mainly those from Bideford). There is also huge concern for post-16 students who saw a massive increase to £444 per term to get to college. Not only this but for everyone more generally with both return tickets and the North Devon zone now scrapped as part of their new ticketing strategy. I raised concern over the price increases urgently at our cabinet meeting and launched a petition which was actively supported by more than 2/3 of county councillors from all parties and rapidly reached more than 1000 signatures. <https://chnq.it/rK7VQ5mfBN>

We have now met with Peter Knight, Managing Director of Stagecoach and have agreed to work more closely in partnership, both to lobby central government in terms of the need for fair funding for our large rural county, but importantly, he has agreed to seriously look at re-zoning and lowering costs for young people under 18 which will likely come into effect in January 2026 <https://www.northdevongazette.co.uk/news/local-news/1870285/devon-mps-and-councillors-quiz-bus-boss-over-rising-fares-for-schoolchildren.html>

At our recent cabinet meeting I presented a report from the public health manager on alcohol harm in Devon. I had to declare that I am not teetotal by any means! But there was real seriousness and shocking statistics in the report, and some of the figures for Devon are double the national average. For example in Devon alone premature death (*which means dying before the age of 74yrs*) from alcoholic liver disease has increased by nearly 42% since 2001 and within the last 10 years alcohol related hospital admissions have grown by 46%. Admissions for alcoholic liver disease have increased by 70%. While nationally we are seeing a *reduction* in alcohol consumption in younger adults (18-34yrs) it still causes significant harm to young people. In Devon, our under-18s hospital admission rate for alcohol-specific conditions are *nearly double the national average*. <https://www.devon.gov.uk/news/cabinet-backs-plan-to-reduce-harm-caused-by-drinking/>

We also agreed a new strategy aiming to increase the number of young people in education, employment or training called "Brighter Futures – Employment, Education and Training Strategy" <https://www.devon.gov.uk/news/strategy-aims-to-create-brighter-futures-for-young-people-in-devon/>

And we backed 'innovative' proposals to work with children's charity Barnardo's to create eight new 'gap' homes, specifically designed to house and support care leavers with complex needs in Barnstaple and Exeter. <https://www.devon.gov.uk/children-families-education/news/were-working-with-barnardos-on-new-homes-for-care-leavers/>

Over the summer we had a very interesting day visiting different locations in North Devon and Torridge in relation to DCC-related economy and skills projects and partner organisations. First stop: Node Cowork at Roundswell which is absolutely thriving and it's great to hear about the innovative businesses which are starting up and growing from this fabulous work space. Particular mention to Julian Dymond from Great Torrington who manages Node and is doing such an awesome job. I know Jules from way back so it was great to see him in more professional circumstances! Second stop: Castle Hill Work Hub, an excellent facility offering flexible work spaces in Great Torrington, a great combination of hot desks, a bookable meeting room and individual private work spaces at the top of the Castle Hill building, at very reasonable rates which include free parking! Third and Fourth stop in the same building: Learn Devon and Bideford Library. It was great to speak to the tutors at Learn Devon who are so passionate about the adults they teach, helping to improve skills and employability for people across Devon, some even enabled to take their exams from home if needed. And upstairs to the truly stunning library, such a fab community space, welcoming various community groups, including knit and natter who were there on the day, as well as all of the events for children and everything else that they do from bounce and rhyme to public health initiatives, oh and don't forget there are books there too!

Also over the summer, we spent a day on the edge of Exeter with Devon County Council's economy and skills teams. We visited Exeter SkyPark and Exeter Science Park (including the Zeal Hotel at the Science Park). At the SkyPark we viewed the range of spaces available- from small business units right up to large companies employing more than 200 people. I was so impressed by the Watercress Research Company and the passion and science behind their business and skincare products, with everything sourced and created locally. This is run by an Exeter University Professor and GP duo (Prof & Doc). We then had a visit to Stovax and Gazco, a large employer, researching and manufacturing high quality products right here in Devon. At Exeter Science Park we were welcomed and shown around by the CEO Dr Sally Basker. 800 people are registered to work at the Science Park which is the collaborative venture of Devon County Council, East Devon District Council, Exeter City Council and Exeter University, structured as non-profit. 25% of the site is currently completed with big opportunities such as defence and offshore energy anticipated in the future. Finally we walked across to the Zeal Hotel within the Science Park, a new, net-zero hotel which opened March this year. The walls and roof are solar pv and generates more electricity than it uses! We learned about the design and the technologies used to build this hotel. They also use local businesses to source food, drinks and products, as well as having their own recipe for sausages 😊 There are also two trees growing inside the hotel. It was so impressive as well as having a very calming atmosphere, oh and brown toilet paper (it cuts out the bleaching process!)

In the first week of September we had our first big full council meeting which a huge amount on the agenda (the meeting went on all day!). We agreed our strategic plan [Strategic Plan sets out vision for a Devon where "everyone thrives" - News](#), and heard cabinet reports from 3 of our cabinet members. It was a daunting day for me as it was my first time addressing full council on my rural affairs portfolio and taking questions from them. I used this opportunity to speak out for Devon's farming community and will be sending a letter highlighting a number of concerns to central government ministers on behalf of the council.

*The full detail of the motion I referred to can be found here:

This Council recognises the vital role that farming plays in Devon, both as a cornerstone of our rural economy and as a guarantor of our national food security. Our farmers provide high-quality, high-welfare produce, while also managing and protecting the environment for future generations.

Council expresses particular concern at the damaging impact of the proposed changes to family farm taxation, which threaten the future of family-run farms across Devon and beyond and has created emotional turmoil across the country. We urge Government to reverse these changes and safeguard the future of the family farm model.

We further note with alarm the sudden closure of the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) applications earlier this year, and call for their reintroduction, with sufficient funding and long-term support to ensure that farm businesses can plan with confidence, while continuing the good work that farmers do and have done for the environment, driving towards our aspirations for carbon reduction and biodiversity alongside quality food production.

This Council also recognises the importance of fair trade deals that do not undermine British farmers. Trade agreements must ensure a level playing field, protecting our high food, welfare and environmental standards and ensuring they are not undercut by cheaper imports produced to lower standards overseas.

We also support calls for agriculture and food production to be embedded within the school curriculum so that young people understand where food comes from and the importance of farming to our country. We endorse the work of the Farmwise initiative led by Devon County Council, which provides an interactive learning day every year for Devon's children focused on food and farming.

We reaffirm our support and commitment to the Devon County Farm Estate, recognising its contribution to developing the next generation of farmers, supporting local communities, and delivering wider benefits to the county.

Finally, this Council recognises the severe challenges faced by farmers around mental health and wellbeing. We condemn the closure of the Farming Resilience Fund earlier this year and call for increased support and promotion of vital mental health and wellbeing services to ensure it reaches those who need it most.

Council resolves the cabinet member for Rural Affairs and the Chair of Farms Estate write to Government Ministers and Devon's MPs setting out these concerns. Council will continue working with the farming community and in collaboration with partner organisations such as the NFU, to be an advocate for the farming community, and ensure a thriving and sustainable future for agriculture in Devon.

As well as this, we voted to support the Smartphone Free Childhood campaign and agreed a countywide ban on smartphones in schools from 2026. This is a bold step to put children's wellbeing, safety, and learning first. [Councillors endorse principle of smartphone ban in schools](#)

We also passed Cllr Yusef's motion on hate crime, sending a clear message that Devon is a county that stands for tolerance, equality, and respect. Hate has no place in our communities.

Finally, I am so proud to announce this new grant fund we have set up at Devon County Council. Designed by young people, for young people 🙌 Please share with your local youth groups!
<https://www.devon.gov.uk/news/new-grant-fund-aims-to-enrich-the-lives-of-devons-young-people/>

If there are any safety defects or other highways type issues please do report them here: [Report a problem - Roads and transport](#)

I was contacted by Jeff Adams of the community Speedwatch team here, and was in the process of organising a locality grant to support a new Speed Indicator Device for High Bickington, but in the meantime was very pleased to find out that he had successfully accessed other grants and has already reached the total! Great news!

Appendix B: Report by Councillor Elliott (Torridge District Council)

Nothing locally, but in Bideford,
Winsford development sports pitches have been allocated to Bideford youth football teams subject to further discussions. The site was part of a section 106 agreement from the nearest housing development.
Pollyfields play area has been approved for the equipment to be upgraded. Just over £40,000 in section 106 monies, £25,000 plus from the capital reserve of TDC and £15,000 raised by the local community at Pollyfields is to be used for the upgrades.

Field Code Changed